(d) to (0 As regards minerals and ores, there has been an increase in exports during 1999-2000 except for marginal decrease during 1998-99. The main reason for fall in export during 1998-99 was lower intake by Japan, South Korea and China—India's major buyers, due to recession in the World steel industry.

**Siege of Tobacco Board Office**

5206. SHRI K. KALAVENKATA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether over 2000 tobacco growers in Andhra Pradesh laid siege to the Tobacco Board office in March, 2000;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the action taken to ensure that tobacco exporters as well as cigarette manufacturers do not exploit the conditions and blackmail the farmers?.

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Several hundred tobacco growers of Andhra Pradesh assembled at the Tobacco Board office on 16th March, 2000.

(b) To present their demands. Action taken to protect the farmers include:

(i) Meetings held with manufacturers, exporters and traders to purchase tobacco at platforms as per requirements indicated while fixing drop size.

(ii) Meetings held with farmers to solve the situation of over supply.

(iii) Inducting Government agency to enter the market to ensure remunerative prices to the farmers.

(iv) Fresh registration of growers not be undertaken for the time being.

**Merger of DIPP with DID**

5207. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal to merge the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and the Department of Industrial Development (DID) in view of the proposal of downsizing of Government; arid